# Source Reliability and Credibility

## Topics

Lesson 1 – Evaluation of Sources and Information

- Types of Sources
- Criteria for the Evaluation of Information
- Reliability of Information
- Source Reliability
- Source Credibility

Lesson 2 – Evaluation of Websites and Content



## Objective

Provide the criteria to evaluate sources and information

# Lesson 1

## Evaluation of Sources and Information



## Types of Sources

**Primary**

- Direct access to the information
  - Conveys the information directly and completely
  - Originator of the information
  - Original documents

- Usually the most accurate for facts
  - First-hand observations, reporting or viewpoints.
- Examples: Speeches, original research reports or studies, creative works, news footage, diaries

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## Types of Sources

**Secondary**

- Conveys information through various types of filters such as intermediary sources
- Translation from the vernacular
- Interprets or analyzes an event or subject
- Examples: Literary criticism, biographies, textbooks, editorial

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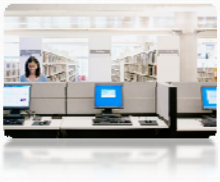
## Types of Sources

**Tertiary**



- Identify and locate primary and secondary sources
- Reference works, collections, or lists of primary and secondary sources
- Examples: Encyclopedias, indices, abstracts, bibliographies, library databases

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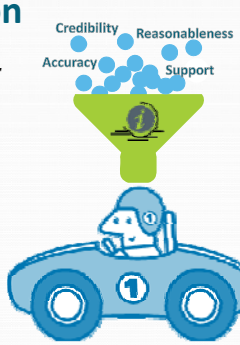
## Criteria for the Evaluation of Information

The CARS checklist for information quality is:




- **C**redibility
- **A**ccuracy
- **R**easonableness
- **S**upport

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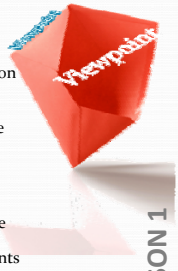
## Criteria for the Evaluation of Information

**Scope of coverage**
- To what extent is the topic is explored
- What is the purpose for providing the information and advertising?

**Authority**
- Expertise or recognized official status of a source
- Consider the reputation of the author and the publisher. What are their credentials?

**Objectivity**
- Is there bias or is an opinion expressed?
- Examine the writing style. Is persuasive language used? Is there a hidden agenda?
- Does the author/source present various viewpoints or a balance of viewpoints?
- What is the purpose for providing the information and advertising?

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## Criteria for the Evaluation of Information

**Accuracy**

- Critical thinking
- What is the editing and publishing policy of the source?
- Is it peer-reviewed?
- Quality control?
- Verification?
- Are there errors?
- Is there evidence of plagiarism?
- Secondary sources should provide cited references

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## Criteria for the Evaluation of Information

**Timeliness**

- Is the information current at the time of publication?

**Other criteria to consider:**

**Age- or skill-level appropriate**

- Is it age- or skill-level appropriate?

**Security**

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## Reliability of Information

| Rank | Reliability | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Confirmed | Confirmed by other sources. Logical in itself. Consistent or agrees with other information on the subject. |
| 2 | Probably True | Not confirmed. Logical in itself. Consistent or agrees with other information on subject. |
| 3 | Possibly True | Not confirmed. Reasonably logical in itself. Agrees with some other information on subject. |
| 4 | Doubtfully True | Not confirmed. Possible, but not logical in itself. No other information on the subject. |
| 5 | Improbable | The contrary is confirmed. Not logical in itself. Contradicted by other information on the subject. |
| 6 | Cannot be Judged | Cannot be determined. No basis exists for evaluating the validity of the information. |

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## Verification of Information

- Always try to find and use the original source.
- Verify, corroborate, or confirm your information with two or three reliable sources.
- Use trustworthy sources for verification, such as reference tools, and electronic tools such as
  - Snopes (www.snopes.com)
  - Quackwatch (www.quackwatch.org)
  - Millersmiles (www.millersmiles.co.uk)
  - Online databases

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## Source Reliability

| Rank | Reliability | Description |
|---|---|---|
| A | Reliable | No doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency. Source has a history of complete reliability and usually demonstrates adherence to known professional standards and verification processes. |
| B | Usually Reliable | Some doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency. Source has a history of valid information most of the time and although it may not have a history of adherence to professionally accepted standards, it generally identifies what is known about sources feeding any broadcast. |
| C | Fairly Reliable | There is doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency but it has provided valid information in the past. |

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## Source Reliability

| Rank | Reliability | Description |
|---|---|---|
| D | Not Usually Reliable | Significant doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency but has provided valid information in the past. |
| E | Not Reliable | Lacking in authenticity, trustworthiness, and competency and has a history of invalid information. |
| F | Cannot be Judged | No basis exists for evaluating the reliability of the source. An example would be a new information source. |

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## Source Reliability Guide

| A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reliable | Usually Reliable | Fairly Reliable | Not Usually Reliable | Not Reliable | Cannot be Judged |
| No doubt | Some doubt | There is doubt | Significant doubt | Lacking | No basis |

Evaluate the level of authenticity, trustworthiness, or competency as well as the source's history of reliability and adherence to professional standards and verification processes.

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## Source Credibility

- Is it believable?
- Authoritative or not authoritative?
- Known and recognized leader
- Associated with a major party, organization, association, news source, or recognized source
- Recognized authority
- Original source
- Ask experts or client for authoritative sources
- Source consistently collects data
- What are the author's credentials?
- Is there evidence of quality control?
- Bad grammar or spelling errors?

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# Lesson 2

## Evaluation of Websites and Content

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## Resources for Evaluating Websites and Content

- 10 C's for Evaluating Internet Resources: http://lgdata.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/docs/547/312051/tenCs.pdf
- Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply and Questions to Ask: www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html
  and the accompanying checklists are available at:
  www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/EvalWorksheet.pdf
  www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/EvalForm_General.pdf
  www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/evaluation_checklist_2009_spring.rtf
- ICYouSee, T is for Thinking: A Guide to Critical Thinking: www.ithacalibrary.com/sp/subjects/guide.php?subject=thinking

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## Resources for Evaluating Websites and Content

- Evaluating Information Found on the Internet: http://guides.library.jhu.edu/content.php?pid=198142&sid=1657518
- Evaluating Web Content: http://libguides.nps.edu/content.php?pid=205994&sid=1727368
- Evaluating Web Pages: www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/pages/bones/lesson5.shtml
- Evaluating Internet Research Sources (CARS checklist): www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm
- C.A.R.S. Checklist for Evaluating Internet Sources: www.andyspinks.com/researchhelp/web/CARS.pdf
- A Guide to Evaluating Resources: www.cornellcollege.edu/politics/courses/allin/Misc/guide%20to%20evaluating%20resources.pdf

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## Resources for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Videos**

- Evaluating Web Sites: www.umuc.edu/library/libhow/websiteevaluation_tutorial.cfm
- How to Evaluate Information on the Web: www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4nmiJLhB5c
- Determining Website Credibility: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKVL1ehDQB0&feature=related
- Evaluating Web Sites Tutorial: www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_qR5lpnXBE&feature=related

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Scope of coverage**
- To what extent is the topic explored?
- What is the purpose for providing the information and advertising?
- What is the purpose/scope – sales, edification, business, advertising, commercial?

**Philosophies, Approaches, Methodologies of the Website**

**Website appearance**
- Is it well designed?

**Authority**
- Expertise or recognized official status of a source.
- Is there an author?
- Reputation of the author and the publisher.
- Does the author have an affiliation with the publishing body of the website?
- Look for other documents by the authors or publishers

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Source**
- Who is the host? Is it the author or the publisher?
- What is the origin?
- Who maintains the site?
- Who owns it?
- Authoritative or scholarly?
- A tilde (or "~" symbol) within the URL often, but not always indicates a personal web page.
- Is the source legitimate? Is there an official logo or name, address and phone number?
- Is this an appropriate source for the topic that you are researching?
- Is there contact information?
- Read the "About Us" and about the authors

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Source**
- Use www.whois.net to obtain ownership information or www.faganfinder.com to find additional information about the URL
- Analyze the trace route – protocol, server, domain, name, path, filename, extension protocol://server.domain.name/path/filename.ext
- Examples of domains
  - Country domains, e.g., .de, .cz,
  - A list is available at www.domainit.com/domains/country-domains.mhtml.
  - This does not guarantee that the site is from another country.
- Types of organizations
  - .biz business
  - .com commercial
  - .edu educational
  - .gov government
  - .mil military
  - .net network
  - .org non-profit organization

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Objectivity**

- Is there bias or is an opinion expressed?
- Examine the writing style. Persuasive language? Hidden agenda? ESL?
- Does the author/source present various viewpoints or a balance of viewpoints?
- What is the purpose for providing the information and advertising?
- Examine the advertising. Does it influence the content?

**Age- or skill-level appropriate**

**Security**

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Accuracy**

- Critical thinking
- Is the information factually irrefutable and complete?
- What is the editing and publishing policy of the source?
- Is it peer-reviewed?
- Is there quality control such as fact-checking before publication?
- Can you verify the information? Are there two or more reliable sources that provide the same information?
- Are there errors?
- Is there evidence of plagiarism?
- Secondary sources should provide cited references

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Timeliness/Currency**

- Is the information current at the time of publication?
- What is the publication date?
- Examine the creation and revision dates
  - Do not rely on dates provided by the search engines
  - Be aware of scripting that creates the current date
- Is the website and the content (individual pages) updated? Was the content changed at the revision date or was it an aesthetic revision?
- Assess the writing for time-sensitive information
  - Avoid undated information, either presented as fact or commentary
- Review the content in historical context

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## Criteria for Evaluating Websites and Content

**Content**

- Intended audience
- Advertising. Does it affect the content?
- Reasoning
- Coverage
- Quality of the writing
- Error-free? (grammar and spelling)
- Quality of cited sources
- Accuracy, Can it be corroborated?
- Does the information sound believable?

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## Exercise

1. Which one of these web pages would you view for a study of Seattle, Washington?
   A. www.ci.seattle.wa.us
   B. http://seattleuniversity.edu/~dudes/party/seattle_emergency.html

2. Which of these appears to be a valid software program?
   A. ftp://ftp.microsoft.com/software/patches/fixit.exe
   B. ftp://ftp.hackers.com/do/you/feel/lucky/trustme.exe
   C. ftp://212.234.45.1/bin/JDE/livid.exe

3. Which of the following is the U.S. White House's official website?
   A. www.whitehouse.gov
   B. www.whitehouse.com
   C. www.whitehouse.us

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